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THE END OF THE STORY

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This investigation had its genesis in a discussion which I have had for some years with a professor of Hebrew about the closing phrase of the Book of Jonah.

Jonah had been compelled, after his unfortunate adventure, to preach repentance to the city of Nineveh. When the Lord accepted the repentance of the Ninevites, Jonah was much disgusted; he even lost his temper. The narrative continues as follows:

“And it came to pass, when the sun did rise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted and wished in himself to die, and said, it is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry even unto death. Then, said the Lord, thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”

I believe the last phrase. “also much cattle,” is pure bathos. My friend, however, argues that this is not bathos at all; it is simply an early reference to the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The Lord having pity upon the people of Nineveh, not only had compassion upon the men, women, and children, but even upon the dumb brutes that would have suffered if Jonah could have had his way, and could have materialized the fire and brimstone which he had been promising in his afternoon sermons. It seems to me, however, much more likely that this trivial end-

ing of an impressive narrative is nothing more than a stylistic trick adopted by the author to bring his narrative to a successful close — or at least a close; for the main thing in telling a story is to stop when you get through, and not to continue until one is reminded of George Eliot's description of the German sentence "which begins without any special cause, continues for an indefinite time in rambling fashion without arriving anywhere, and when the end does at last come it seems to be more by the direct interposition of Providence than through any intention on the part of the author."

It occurred to me that it might be of interest to examine some ancient narratives, to see what method the authors employ to bring their narratives to a close.

It is well known that the successful telling of a story depends on the careful selection of vivid details. These details must be unusual and numerous enough to give the narrative body and point; at the same time there must not be too many of them. The storyteller who halts in the midst of his narrative for a reminiscent pause, and then says, "No, it was a *bay* horse." is a familiar type. The Hebrew narratives are especially rich in the selection of vivid details. Witness the description in Judges, Chapter III, of the killing of Eglon by Ehud. Eglon is spoken of as a very fat man, and Ehud is left handed. These details seem quite unnecessary and pointless until we have the final setting of the tragedy in Eglon's summerhouse, where Ehud draws his sword from his right thigh and plunges it into the body of Eglon where the fat closes over the haft, and the sword cannot be withdrawn.

Given this fondness for detail so well known in Hebrew and Greek narrative, it seems to me quite possible that an author may choose to close his narrative with a touch of this kind, which may be the touch of genius, or as I believe in the case of Jonah, a piece of pure bathos.

Ancient authors, so far as I know, rarely close their narratives with the peculiar flip which O. Henry has made so common, and which Dunn uses so effectively in his Dooley satires. A fine instance of this is the close of the satire on "Diplomatic Uniforms."

This type of finale is, however, sometimes found. In Horace's second epode we have a fine description of the delights of country life. It is only at the close that we find it is the Shylock, Alfius, who has given us this sympathetic picture of the farmer's pleasures. "And when he had said this the money lender Alfius, all agog with eagerness to become a farmer, called in all his money on the Ides, and on the Kalends he seeks to — let it out again." The same surprise ending occurs at the close of the seventh satire of the first book, and is common in epigram. But in general an ancient narrative is much more likely to come to its close in the "so-they-lived-happy-ever-afterwards" sort of way, so familiar in the eighteenth century novel.

The practice of Greek writers in closing their narrative is worth noting, and is distinctly in line with my interpretation of the closing phrases of Jonah.

Herodotus, in his narrative of the more important battles in the Persian War, almost invariably relates the facts of the battle, and then, as if an after-thought, closes the account with a brief story. So after the battle of Marathon (VI, 117): "In this battle at Marathon there died of the barbarians about six thousand four hundred men; and of the Athenians, one hundred and ninety-two; so many fell on both sides. The following prodigy occurred there: An Athenian, Epizélus, son of Cuphagoras, while fighting in the melee, and behaving valiantly, was deprived of sight, though wounded in no part of his body, nor struck from a distance; and he continued to be blind from that time for the remainder of his life. I have heard that he used to give the following account of his loss: He thought that a large heavy-armed man stood before him, whose beard shaded the whole of his shield; that this spectre passed by him, and killed the man that stood by his side. Such is the account, I have been informed, Epizélus used to give." Again after the battle of Thermopylae (VI, 226), Herodotus relates the anecdote of Dieneces: "Though Lacedaemonians and Thespians behaved in this manner, yet Dieneces, a Spartan, is said to have been the bravest man. They relate that he made the following remark: Before they engaged

with the Medes, he heard a Trachinian say that when the barbarians let fly their arrows, they would obscure the sun by the multitude of their shafts, so great were their numbers; but, not at all alarmed at this, he said, holding in contempt the number of the Medes, that their Trachinian friend told them everything to their advantage, since if the Medes obscured the sun, they would then have to fight in the shade, and not in the sun." After Salamis also Herodotus (VII, 91) adds an anecdote of how Polycritus of Aegina replied to Themistocles' charge that the Aeginetans had Medized.

An instance more nearly like that in the close of the Book of Jonah occurs in the narrative of the taking of Babylon (I, 191): "It is related by the people who inhabited this city, that by reason of its great extent, when they who were at the extremities were taken, those of the Babylonians who inhabited the center knew nothing of the capture, (for it happened to be a festival;) but they were dancing at the time and enjoying themselves, till they received certain information of the truth; and thus Babylon was taken for the first time." The capture of the city has been carefully described, but instead of ending the narrative when the city is taken, Herodotus adds this detail which gives the narrative vividness and brings it naturally to an artistic close. The final sentence in this narrative is a typical Herodotean close. It is like the sentence with which he concludes the description of the death of Cyrus the Great (I, 214): "Of the many accounts given of the end of Cyrus, this appears to me most worthy of credit."

Thucydides, in his account of the campaign at Pylos, makes use of Herodotus' method of narration. After telling of the capture of the Spartans at Sphacteria, and completing his narrative of events, he tells the story of the Spartan retort to the Athenian (VI, 39): "There is a story of a reply made by a captive taken in the island to one of the Athenian allies who had sneeringly asked, 'Where were their brave men — all killed?' He answered that 'The Spindle' (meaning the arrow) 'would be indeed a valuable weapon if it picked out the brave.'" But

Thucydides is very careful to conclude almost every narrative with a formal close. In this particular case, at the end of Chapter 41, he remarks, "Thus ended the affair at Pylos." And so in the case of the revolt of Mitylene. The Athenians had voted to put all of the inhabitants of the island to death, and had sent out a galley to execute the order. The next morning, holding another assembly, they voted to rescind this order, and dispatched a galley which rode at full speed across the Aegean in a desperate attempt to prevent the execution of the previous decree. The galley arrived barely in time — just as the decree of death had been read to the inhabitants of the wretched city: "So near was Mitylene to destruction," remarks Thucydides.

Again when part of the garrison of beleaguered Platea cut their way out on a tempestuous night, Thucydides closes his narrative by remarking: "Thus the Plateans scaled the wall and escaped."

At the close of the disastrous Sicilian expedition, Thucydides breaks that rare reserve for which he is so justly noted, and says of Nicias, one of the two generals who suffered defeat at the hands of the Syracusans, "For these or the like reasons he suffered death. No one of the Hellenes in my time was less deserving of so miserable an end; for he lived in the practice of every virtue." A little later, after reflection on the greatness of the disaster, he closes with the words: "Thus ended the Sicilian expedition."

Thucydides cannot, therefore, be said, except perhaps in the case of the incident at Pylos, to follow Herodotus' custom of concluding a narrative with an anecdote, nor of ending an anecdote with a detail.

But in Xenophon this stylistic practice is well developed. At the close of the Peloponnesian War, after the annihilation of the Athenian fleet at Aegospotami, Xenophon describes at considerable length the siege and capitulation of Athens, and closes his narrative with this passage (Hel. 2. 2. 23): "Subsequently Lysander sailed into Pyraeus, and the exiles were restored; and they rased the walls with much glee, to the music of women playing

the flute; considering that day to be the beginning of liberty for Hellas." That the walls of Athens should have been leveled to the music of flutes is but a single detail of the many given in the seige, but it brings out the dramatic situation with a vividness that no amount of elaborate description could produce.

Where Xenophon is describing the death of Agesipolis, he closes with this remark (Hel. 5. 3. 18): "Being put in honey, and conveyed home, he was honored with a royal interment." Again a vivid detail added to close a striking narrative.

The battle of Leuctra is described with considerable minuteness, and its close is marked again by its detail in this case quite insignificant and rather pointless (Hel. 6. 4. 14): "The Lacedaemonians on the left, seeing the right wing thus repulsed, also gave way, yet, though many were killed, and they were quite defeated, they were able when they had repassed the trench which was in front of their camp, to form themselves under arms in the place from which they had set out. Their camp was nevertheless not on level ground, but rather somewhat on an acclivity." The fact that the camp was on a slope probably had some point at that time, and Xenophon may even have intended to introduce it in his later narrative. He does not, however, and the narrative closes with rather the effect of "also much cattle."

The story of Panthea and her great love for her husband, and her suicide at his death, is told with much charm and interest. It closes in the following way (Cyro. 7. 3. 15): "Cyrus, as he approached the scene of death, was struck with admiration for the woman, and went away lamenting her fate. He attended, as was proper, to the dead, that they might receive every honor; and the monument, as they say, was raised to a very great height." It is true, I presume, that story of every man's life should end with his monument, and the details as to its height, weight, cubic contents, and cost; but the casual way in which Xenophon mentions this shows, I believe, that he intended definitely to bring this narrative to an unemotional close by a simple statement of an unimportant item. This is reminiscent of the close of "Enoch Arden:"

"So passed the strong heroic soul away
And when they buried him the little port
Had seldom seen a costlier funeral."

There are at least two good examples of this type of close in the *Anabasis*. The treachery of Orontas makes one of the exciting stories in the first book. Orontas is tried, admits his guilt, and is led to execution amidst the sorrow of his attendants, who fairly worship him (*Anab.* I, 6.11): "After that no man saw Orontas more either living or dead, nor did anyone of his own knowledge say how he died, but some gave one account and some another; and no man saw his tomb."

The death of Cyrus is a striking narrative. When he fell one of his faithful followers committed suicide upon Cyrus' body (*Anab.* I, 8.29): ". . . drawing his dagger, for he had one of gold, and he wore a necklace and bracelets and other ornaments such as the noblest of the Persians wear. For he was honored by Cyrus because of his kindness and faithfulness." In this golden dagger drawn by Cyrus' follower I think we have quite the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "cattle." Only in Xenophon's narration the detail adds realism and a warmth of personality to the narrative. This cannot be said of the unfortunate conclusion of *Jonah*.

It is in Plutarch that we see this stylistic trick more completely developed than in any other author I have examined. Sulla's revolting death is detailed in all its loathsome peculiarities. And then Plutarch adds (*Sulla* 37.4): "For it was after his death that Valeria gave birth to a daughter, who was called Postuma, this being the name which the Romans gave to children who are born after their father's death."

Plutarch's description of Alexander's death is taken from the *Court Journal*. After discussing the charges of poisoning and dismissing them, Plutarch closes the brilliant narrative with the following sentence (*Alex.* 77, 5): "Arrhidaeus was Phillip's son by an obscure and common woman named Philinna, and was deficient in intellect owing to bodily disease. This, however, did not come upon him in the course of nature or of its own accord;

indeed it is said that as a boy he displayed an exceedingly gifted and noble disposition, but afterward Olympias gave him drugs which injured his body and ruined his mind."

Demosthenes takes poison and staggers out of the temple of Poseidon at Calauria with death in his heart, and Plutarch adds (Dem. 30.4): "And he died on the sixteenth of the month of Pyanepsion, the most gloomy day of the Thesmophoria, which the women observe by fasting in the temple of the goddess."

Caesar is attacked in the Senate House and Plutarch says (Caes. 66.6): "And it is said by some writers that although Caesar defended himself against the rest and darted this way and that and cried aloud, when he saw that Brutus had drawn his dagger, he pulled his toga down over his head and sank either by chance or because pushed there by his murderers, against the pedestal on which the statue of Pompey stood. And the pedestal was drenched with his blood, so that one might have thought that Pompey himself was presiding over this vengeance upon his enemy, who now lay prostrate at his feet, quivering from a multitude of wounds. For it is said that he received twenty-three; and many of the conspirators were wounded by one another, as they struggled to plant all those blows in one body." Of course no one can say that the wounding of the conspirators by one another is not a detail that adds to the vividness of the narrative. It does. But my point is that the narrative is closed by an unessential detail which might have been omitted, but which in this case adds interest and color to the account.

Cicero's death is one of the best examples which I have been able to adduce. Cicero had left his villa and was attempting half-heartedly to escape from Antony's proscription when he was overtaken by some troops commanded by Herennius (Cic. 48.3): "Then he himself, clasping his chin with his left hand, as was his wont, looked steadfastly at his slayers, his head all squalid and unkempt, and his face wasted with anxiety, so that most of those that stood by covered their faces while Herennius was slaying him. For he stretched his neck forth from the litter and was slain, being then in his sixty-fourth year. Herennius cut off his head, by

Antony's command, and his hands — the hand with which he wrote the *Philippics*. For Cicero himself entitles his speeches against Antony '*Philippics*,' and to this day the documents are called '*Philippics*.' ”

I think these examples are enough to prove my point, namely, that the Greek writer is prone to close his narrative by adding some detail which may give vividness and interest to the account, or which may, as in the case of the Hebrew writer, be a distracting element. I cannot see in the “also much cattle” a reference to the early history of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the W. C. T. U., or the anti-Saloon League. It is simply a stylistic trick. It is that artistic impulse, which, at its best in the Greek and Roman writers, leads them to close a vivid narrative on a diminishing and not an increasing strain. It is the *diminuendo*, and not the *crescendo*. It is a quiet close that brings the *Odyssey* to an end with the reunion of Ulysses and Laertes after the battle of the suitor. It is the picture of Regulus after his great speech before the Roman Senate urging them to refuse a peace of dishonor — but a peace which would have saved his own life, turning from the friends who would have delayed his return, to go back to Carthage to face torture and death (Horace, Ode 3.5): “As if the suit were decided and he were leaving the weary business of his clients to fare forth to the Venafran fields or Lacedaemonian Tarentum.”